

Culture and disease

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Asthma is a disease that is sweeping the country. With so many new cases being reported daily, it has become somewhat of an epidemic. It can be found in almost all corners of the world. Although it is most common in the US, Canada, and UK, it is growing more common in heavily industrialized countries like Brazil and South Africa. This disease can affect anyone; from women to men, children to adults, Caucasians to African Americans. However, it is most prevalent in African Americans, and even more so in African American women.

Asthma is a chronic disease of the lungs and one of the most common long term diseases in children ("Asthma", n. d). The actual cause of asthma is unknown and there is currently no cure, but certain things in the environment trigger the inflammation of the airways, ultimately leading to asthma attacks. However, it is manageable and can be prevented by avoiding your triggers. Triggers vary for every person, but the most common are tobacco smoke, dust mites, pets, and pollution ("Asthma", n. d).

The symptoms include tightness in the chest, coughing, and wheezing ("Asthma", n. d). Asthma attacks can be deadly if they are not taken care of right away. During an attack the airways in your lungs shrink and do not allow enough air to pass through. Since we do not know the cause of asthma, why is it that African Americans are three times more likely to be hospitalized from it ("Asthma Facts And Figures", n. d)? According to "Asthma data surveillance" (n. d) African Americans are at 11.6% for having asthma, compared to Caucasians at 8.2% or Hispanics at 7.3%.

African Americans are also three times more likely to die from asthma, and African American Women have the highest asthma mortality rate of all groups, more than 2.5 times higher than Caucasian women ("Asthma Facts And Figures", n.d.). Some researchers believe that it is socioeconomic while others believe it is genetic. Either way, the numbers speak for themselves; for some reason African Americans are more likely to have asthma than any other culture. Looking at socioeconomic reasons, there are many that can be factors in why African Americans are more likely to develop asthma.

According to (Castillo, Jordan III, & Tan, n.d.) studies have been done that show even though the same healthcare is offered to both Caucasians and African Americans; the quality of treatment is often lower for the latter. A certain study even discovered that, in a poor minority neighborhood, there was a higher rate of hospitalization and considerably less people with inhalers (Castillo, Jordan III, & Tan, n.d.).

It was also found that minorities compared to Caucasians, would have an increased chance of seeing primary care physicians rather than specialists because of the cost that specialists usually charged (Castillo, Jordan III, & Tan, n.d.). Another contributing factor could be lower literacy levels in not only the African American culture, but minorities as a whole. Studies have been done to correlate the two, and what was found was that out of 483 minority patients, mostly African-American only 27% of the study subjects could read at a high school level (Castillo, Jordan III, & Tan, n.d.). This is important because the patients may not comprehend important information given to them about the disease. There are also environmental factors that affect not only this culture, but the population as a whole.

Since asthma is triggered by particles in the air, pollution is a big factor in it. Living in areas with higher pollution rates will definitely affect those with asthma. African American children have been known to live in more polluted areas, which help develop more vulnerability to allergens (Castillo, Jordan III, & Tan, n. d.). The pollution in the high level of ozone is the one that can trigger asthma attacks among African-American children. The ozone causes irritation to the lungs, and then creates inflammation in the lungs making it hard to breathe (Castillo, Jordan III, & Tan, n. d.).

All of these factors have been known to increase restriction in the airways which results in a greater number of children being hospitalized in these polluted areas. As mentioned before, asthma is not curable. However, it is treatable with the correct combination of medications prescribed by a doctor. Medications can either be given in pill form (anti-inflammatories) or inhaler form (bronchodilators). There are also two types: long term and quick control. The long term medications are to help the patient have fewer and milder attacks, but they will not help during an asthma attack ("Asthma", n.). Inhalers are the most common for quick control. During an asthma attack, taking an inhaler is one way to help control the symptoms, and get the attack under control. The other way to help manage asthma is to avoid triggers. Everyone has different triggers, where pet dander may affect one person; it may not affect someone else. One way schools are working to promote the awareness of asthma is by letting students and parents know the air quality for the day. Schools now have a colored flag for the three air qualities. Green is for good, yellow is for moderate, and red for unhealthy.

Students often have to miss school because of asthma attacks or asthma related problems. If parents and teachers can work together to educate the students about the importance of staying indoors on unhealthy days, we can help to prevent attacks. Another way is about educating children on the benefits of staying away from people who are smoking. We see the commercials on television constantly; the ones with the baby in the crib and the smoke finding its way from a nearby apartment into the child's lungs. The baby goes into a coughing fit and we are reminded how easily smoke can travel.

Second hand smoke is dangerous, especially to someone whose asthma can be triggered by it, sending them into an attack. Anyone can get this disease, although it is more prevalent in African Americans. Even though it is not curable, educating people on this deadly disease is an important aspect to ensuring those affected by it can manage it. Avoiding your personal triggers and making sure you have spoken with a doctor about a treatment plan is key. In this case, both culture and environmental factors have contributed to why African Americans are more commonly diagnosed with this disease.

References:

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